

**INTERNATIONAL SECURITY UPDATE****March 19 - 26, 2015**

1. [Counter-ISIL Coalition Provides Air Support in Battle for Tikrit](#) (03-25-2015)
2. [Obama Extends U.S. Troop Levels to Boost Afghan Security](#) (03-25-2015)
3. [Key Facts on Strengthening the U.S.-Afghan Strategic Partnership](#) (03-24-2015)
4. [U.S.-Afghanistan Joint Statement on Strategic Relationship](#) (03-24-2015)
5. [Dempsey: North Korea 'Somewhat Predictable' in Provocation](#) (03-24-2015)
6. [Security Adviser Rice's Meeting with Syrian Opposition Figure](#) (03-24-2015)
7. [Joint Statement on Libyan Political Talks](#) (03-21-2015)
8. [Joint statement on progress of Iran nuclear talks](#) (03-21-2015)
9. [Facts on Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification](#) (03-20-2015)
10. [Facts on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Disarmament Pillar](#) (03-20-2015)
11. [Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Sarmin, Syria](#) (03-19-2015)

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**1. [Counter-ISIL Coalition Provides Air Support in Battle for Tikrit](#) (03-25-2015)***Posted by DipNote*

At the request of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, the Coalition today launched airstrikes in and around Tikrit in support of Iraqi Security Forces ground operations. In a statement to the press, Department Spokesperson Jen Psaki said:

"These strikes were designed to destroy ISIL strongholds with precision -- protecting innocent Iraqis by minimizing damage to infrastructure, and enabling Iraqi forces under Iraqi command to continue offensive operations against ISIL in the vicinity of Tikrit. All strikes were coordinated with the Government of Iraq and Iraqi Security Forces through our Joint Operation Center in Baghdad.

"Before today, the Coalition has conducted 2,967 airstrikes against ISIL terrorists, 1,678 in Iraq and 1,289 in Syria. These airstrikes have had a significant impact on ISIL -- taking out thousands of fighters, numerous commanders, nearly 1,500 vehicles and tanks, over 100 artillery and mortar positions, and nearly 3,400 fighting positions, training camps, and bunkers in Iraq and Syria. Airstrikes have also damaged close to 200 oil and gas facilities -- infrastructure that in part funds ISIL's terror. In addition, Coalition trainers have begun training Iraqi Army brigades at four sites in

Iraq, and Coalition advisors have helped enable more than two dozen ground operations against ISIL strongholds across Iraq.

"The cumulative effect of these actions has been enormous. ISIL can no longer operate freely in roughly 25 percent of populated areas of Iraqi territory where they once could. Its momentum has been blunted, its ability to mass and maneuver forces degraded, its leadership cells eliminated or pressured, and its supply lines severed. ISIL is now on the defensive in Iraq and the lives of innocent Iraqis of all faiths and ethnicity have been saved. As Iraqi forces increasingly mount offensive operations, they must do so under Iraqi command, with concerted efforts to protect local populations, and secure the human rights of all Iraqi citizens as mandated under the Iraqi constitution and as Prime Minister Abadi and other Iraq leaders have pledged.

"The United States and the Iraqi Government will continue to work together on our shared goal of defeating ISIL and training a professional national security force that can protect all the Iraqi people against extremist threats."

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## **2. Obama Extends U.S. Troop Levels to Boost Afghan Security (03-25-2015)**

*By Cheryl Pellerin*

President Barack Obama has extended troop levels in Afghanistan several months beyond the original drawdown plan to help Afghan security forces succeed during the upcoming fighting season.

During a news conference yesterday after meeting with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, Obama took the podium with Ghani and announced several areas in which the United States would continue to support the nation's strategic partnership with Afghanistan.

"First," Obama said, "we agreed to continue to keep in place our close security cooperation. Afghanistan remains a very dangerous place and insurgents still launch attacks, including cowardly suicide bombings against civilians."

The president said Ghani is pursuing reforms to further strengthen Afghan security forces, including respect for human rights. And as part of the ongoing NATO-led Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, the United States will continue to train, advise and assist Afghan security forces.

### **Continued Support for Afghanistan**

The administration also will work with Congress on funding to sustain 352,000 Afghan police and troops through 2017, Obama said. "At the same time, we'll continue to conduct targeted counterterrorism operations," he added. And he and Ghani agreed to maintain a dialogue on the counterterrorism partnership in the years ahead, Obama said.

In a decision reached in May between the United States and Afghanistan, 9,800 U.S. troops would stay in Afghanistan for the Resolute Support mission until Sept. 30, the end of fiscal year 2015. Then troop levels would fall to 5,500 for the rest of the year and most of 2016.

"President Ghani has requested some flexibility on our drawdown timelines," Obama said. "I've consulted with [Gen. John F. Campbell, commander of the Resolute Support mission and U.S.

Forces in Afghanistan], and my national security team and I have decided that we will maintain our current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of this year.”

A final decision on the drawdown speed in 2016 will be established later this year, he added.

### **Moving the Drawdown to the Right**

“We’re essentially moving the drawdown pace over to the right for several months, in part to compensate for the lengthy period it took for government formation,” Obama said, “in part because we want to make sure that we’re doing everything we can to help Afghan security forces succeed ... so we don’t have to respond in an emergency because terrorist activities are being launched out of Afghanistan. We’re on the path to do that.”

Continuing his description of areas of U.S. support for Afghanistan, Obama said support would continue for an Afghan-led reconciliation process with the Taliban and an outreach effort to Pakistan.

“President Ghani, you’ve shown bold leadership in reaching out to Pakistan, which is critical to the pursuit of peace,” Obama said. “Afghanistan and the United States agree on what the Taliban must do, which is break with Al Qaida, renounce violence and abide by Afghan laws, including the protections for women and minorities.”

### **Serving All of the Afghan People**

The United States also will continue to do the following, Obama said:

- Support the national unity government in its efforts to serve all the Afghan people;
- Be Afghanistan’s partner in advancing the rights and dignity of all Afghans, including women and girls; and
- Support the development that underpins stability and improves the lives of the Afghan people.

“President Ghani is a leading expert on development, and I’ve been impressed by the reforms he’s pursuing to make Afghanistan more self-reliant,” Obama said. “He wants to empower Afghans in these efforts, and that’s why under the new development partnership that we announced yesterday, U.S. economic assistance will increasingly go through Afghan institutions, in support of Afghan priorities, with an emphasis on accountability, performance and achieving results.”

### **Revitalizing the Partnership**

In his remarks, the Afghan president said tragedy brought Afghanistan and the United States together and common interests now unite the nations.

“We can assure you that the government of national unity has revitalized the partnership and looks at this partnership with the United States as foundational, not just for Afghanistan’s stability but for regional and global stability,” Ghani said.

The flexibility provided by the United States for 2015, he said, will be used to accelerate reforms and to ensure that the Afghan national security forces are much better led, equipped and trained, and are focused on the fundamental mission.

"I'm pleased to say that the departure of 120,000 international troops has not brought about the security gap or the collapse that was often anticipated," Ghani said.

### **Afghanistan's Embrace of Democracy**

Ghani said his country is unique in its embrace of democracy, and the Afghan people are proud of their Islamic civilization, which is in dialogue with the world, and they have the capacity to speak truth to terror.

The terrorists, he added, "do not speak for Islam. We do. It is the genuine Islam that is interested in dialogue with civilizations, and cooperation and endeavor forward."

On regional cooperation, Ghani said his administration has taken steps to reconcile with the Taliban and reach out to Pakistan.

"We do hope that these steps will be reciprocated because the threats that exist, the changing ecology of terror, are making it imperative that all governments cooperate with each other," he said.

### **Interconnected World**

"Afghanistan is on the front line," Ghani added. "Because of American engagement in Afghanistan, there have not been attacks on mainland United States. But let's not forget that fortresses cannot be built around countries or continents. We are living in an interconnected world and our security is joined together."

Obama noted that Afghanistan and the world are marked by incredible diversity and differences of history, culture and faiths.

But, he said, "I believe that the progress we've made in this visit will help advance the goal for which so many of your citizens, Mr. President, have sacrificed over the years, the goal of making our two countries and the world safer."

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## **3. Key Facts on Strengthening the U.S.-Afghan Strategic Partnership (03-24-2015)**

### *FACT SHEET*

#### **Strengthening the Strategic Partnership of the United States and Afghanistan**

During the historic visit to Washington of President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah from March 22 to 25, 2015, U.S. and Afghan officials have reviewed the achievements of the last 13 years and discussed the actions each country needs to take to ensure that the social, economic, security, and human rights gains made over that period are sustained and advanced. Secretary of State John Kerry -- joined by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter, Secretary of the Treasury Jacob Lew, and other senior U.S. officials -- held strategic dialogue sessions at Camp David with President Ghani and the Afghan delegation on March 23 to discuss a broad range of bilateral issues. Both sides renewed the commitments they made in the 2012 Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which laid the framework for their long-term partnership, and announced the following:

**Restart of the Bilateral Commission:** Secretary Kerry announced his intention to travel to Kabul later in 2015 to co-chair the next meeting of the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Commission with his counterpart Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani. The SPA signed in May 2012 established the Bilateral Commission to provide a regular forum for talks between the two countries on bilateral issues and for monitoring progress toward implementation of the Agreement. It has met twice, the last time in Kabul in May 2013.

**New Development Partnership:** Secretary Kerry and President Ghani announced their plan to initiate an \$800 million “New Development Partnership” that signals a new era of development cooperation between both governments. The New Development Partnership will help to maintain and build on the development gains made over the last decade and promote Afghanistan’s self-reliance by incentivizing Afghan solutions to specific development challenges. It will significantly expand and enhance the strategic effects of the U.S. Government’s existing pilot incentivization program, which has been focused on short-term policy actions. This new partnership reaffirms the United States’ commitment to strengthening Afghanistan’s institutions, and to sustainability and fiscal transparency, while providing the Afghan government the opportunity to lead its own development trajectory. The U.S. Agency for International Development will oversee funding under the New Development Partnership, which will be disbursed only after agreed reforms or development results have been accomplished, as measured by clear and objective indicators of achievement. This initiative supports the new government’s ambitious efforts to improve the effectiveness and accountability of its own systems for managing resources and delivering development results.

**Intent to Sustain the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces at 352,000 through 2017:** The U.S. government confirmed at the Camp David strategic security session that it intends to seek funding to support the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces at the level of 352,000 personnel through at least 2017.

**Capacity Building Project:** The U.S. Treasury Office of Technical Assistance (OTA) has committed to develop technical assistance and capacity building programs in partnership with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in order to strengthen Afghanistan’s public financial management systems and oversight of its financial sector. Secretary Lew and Finance Minister Hakimi signed an agreement regarding this initiative at Camp David on March 23.

**High-Level Side Meeting at UNGA:** The U.S. Government committed to holding a high-level event on Afghanistan on the margins of the opening of the 70th United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York in September. The event will allow the Afghan government and the international community to reflect on the achievements of the unity government’s first year and discuss goals and challenges for the year to come.

**U.S. Support for Electoral Reforms:** In continued support of the Afghan democratic process, and noting the announcement on March 20 of the establishment of the Special Commission on Electoral Reform, USAID intends to provide \$30 million in support of electoral reform and operations.

**Contribution to the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program:** As noted in the Joint Statement, the U.S. Government will make available up to \$10 million to support the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP). The APRP is an Afghan government program combining political, security and development dimensions of peace building to reintegrate former fighters into Afghan society through vocational training, alternative livelihood projects, and capacity building at national

and provincial government institutions. The program supports the efforts of the Afghan High Peace Council.

**Restart the Security Consultative Forum:** Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter announced at the security session of the talks at Camp David that in 2015 the Department of Defense would resume the Security Consultative Forum (SCF) with Afghan Ministries of Defense and Interior. The SCF is a strategic defense dialogue between DoD and Afghan security ministries that began in May 2010 as part of a broader U.S. government cabinet-level engagement with Afghan ministries. The last round of the SCF was convened May 2012 in Washington. Its outcomes will be reported back to the full Bilateral Commission.

**Reconfirmation of Cooperation to Establish the Joint Commission:** The U.S. and Afghan governments reconfirmed their commitment to continue cooperation to form a bilateral Joint Commission to oversee implementation of the U.S.-Afghanistan Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement (also known as the Bilateral Security Agreement or BSA). The Joint Commission, to be co-chaired by representatives from the Department of Defense and the Afghan Ministry of Defense, will oversee implementation of the terms of the BSA and coordinate and exchange information with the Working Group on Defense and Security Cooperation established under the SPA. The BSA was signed on September 30, 2014.

**Expansion of the Fulbright Program:** The Department of State expressed its intention to expand the Fulbright and Afghan Junior Faculty Development programs for the next five years, increasing the number of U.S.-based fellowships available for Afghans in fields critical to their country's national development. The expansion aims to increase the number of Fulbright participants by 50 percent from current levels, making the program one of the largest in the world and demonstrating the United States government's continued and long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

**Scholarships for Afghan Women:** The United States has also established a scholarship program to support women attending universities throughout Afghanistan. USAID's \$18 million program begins this year in coordination with the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education. In later years, it will be run by an Afghan organization funded by an endowment already authorized by Congress.

**TIFA Talks:** The Office of the United States Trade Representative and the Government of Afghanistan expressed their intention to hold a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) Council Meeting in 2015, following confirmation of an Afghan Minister of Commerce and Industries. The meeting will provide a forum for the United States and Afghanistan to discuss issues of mutual interest at senior levels of government with the objective of improving cooperation and enhancing opportunities for trade and investment.

**Smithsonian Exhibition of Afghan Handicrafts:** The Smithsonian Institution, in cooperation with USAID, looks forward to hosting in 2016 a major exhibition involving Afghanistan artisans, featuring the Turquoise Mountain Foundation.

**Digital Connectivity:** The White House and USAID are co-hosting a high-level meeting with the Afghan delegation to advance collaboration on internet access, digital financial services, and e-government.

**U.S.-Afghan Regional Energy Working Group:** The United States and Afghanistan agreed to establish a Joint Working Group charged with exploring ways to support Afghanistan's integration into regional energy markets. The Department of State, USAID, the Treasury Department, and other relevant U.S. agencies will participate in this initiative.

#### **4. U.S.-Afghanistan Joint Statement on Strategic Relationship (03-24-2015)**

*THE WHITE HOUSE*

*Office of the Press Secretary*

President Barack Obama welcomed Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, and the accompanying Afghan delegation to Washington from March 22-26, 2015.

The visit offered an opportunity to renew U.S.-Afghan relations, review the joint achievements of the last 13 years in Afghanistan, and to discuss the actions each country needs to take to ensure that the social, economic, security and human rights gains made over that period are sustained and advanced.

President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah expressed deep appreciation for the contributions, sacrifices and sustained commitment of the United States that made these achievements possible and underscored that this support is paying dividends for Afghans, Americans, and the international community alike. The Afghan economy has grown more than fourfold over the last 13 years and young Afghans are attending school at unprecedented levels, with girls and women comprising a growing percentage of these students.

The leaders further noted the success of joint counter-terrorism efforts to date and emphasized that sustained U.S. and other international assistance will be important to enable the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to address the significant security challenges facing Afghanistan and the wider region. President Obama and President Ghani reiterated their commitments under the U.S.-Afghanistan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and the U.S.-Afghanistan Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement (also known as the Bilateral Security Agreement, or BSA) to advance common objectives in these and other areas. The Presidents welcomed the decision of Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Rabbani made on March 23 at Camp David to meet again in Kabul this year to restart the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Commission meetings and to review progress in the implementation of the SPA.

#### **Promoting Our Shared Democratic Values**

President Obama commended President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and the Afghan people on the landmark 2014 presidential election resulting in the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. President Ghani noted that the broad based and inclusive National Unity Government that emerged from that election enjoys the full support of the Afghan people. President Obama welcomed the recent announcement of a slate of cabinet nominees. President Ghani reaffirmed the new Afghan government's commitment to maintaining and expanding the role of an independent, vibrant civil society and to protecting the human rights of all Afghans. President Obama encouraged a strong partnership between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah and welcomed the National Unity Government's goals of promoting security, economic growth, democracy and human rights, in particular the rights of women and minorities. President Obama further welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Afghan Special Commission for Electoral Reform envisioned in the September 2014 political framework as a means to further the national unity government's goals in this area and offered financial support for Afghan electoral operations and reform efforts.

#### **Advancing Long-Term Security and Strengthening the Peace Process**

President Ghani and President Obama reaffirmed their shared commitment, reflected in the SPA and BSA, to closely cooperate in preventing terrorists from ever again using Afghan soil to threaten Afghanistan, the region, or the world. President Obama hailed the successful completion of the security transition, the end of the NATO-led combat mission, and Afghan forces taking the lead on, and full responsibility for, security throughout Afghanistan. The leaders also acknowledged the important continuing role of NATO's new Resolute Support Mission in supporting the further development of the ANDSF's capabilities.

Both Presidents saluted the courage and growing capability of Afghan security forces, including their success in securing the elections last year. The leaders joined in paying their respects to the families of Afghan soldiers and civilians who have been killed or injured in the 13-year war. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah also offered condolences to the families of American soldiers and civilians who were killed and injured while serving in Afghanistan, and on behalf of the Afghan people, expressed gratitude to the American people for their sacrifices and continued support.

Both sides agreed on an early formation of the Joint Commission to oversee the implementation of the BSA and President Obama affirmed ongoing U.S. support for Afghan security forces. Based on President Ghani's request for flexibility in the U.S. draw down timeline, the U.S. will maintain its current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of 2015. The specific trajectory of the 2016 U.S. troop drawdown will be established later in 2015 to enable the U.S. troop consolidation to a Kabul-based embassy presence by the end of 2016. This flexibility reflects the re-invigorated partnership with Afghanistan, which is aimed at making Afghanistan secure and preventing it from being used to launch terrorist attacks. Reconciliation and a political settlement remain the surest way to achieve the full retrograde of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan in a way that safeguards international interests and peace in Afghanistan, as well as U.S. national security interests. Consistent with the principles of the SPA and BSA and as part of the broader bilateral security relationship, the two Presidents agreed to continue a dialogue on U.S. and Afghan counterterrorism (CT) objectives, to include the development of a joint CT partnership strategy through and beyond 2016.

While reaffirming their determination to cooperate against those who advocate violence and extremism, President Obama and President Ghani also stressed the need for an Afghan-led peace process, enjoying regional support, in particular from Pakistan, noting that as a part of the outcome of any such process, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups must end violence, break ties with international terrorist groups, and accept Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for the rights of women and minorities. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah emphasized their mutual and strong determination to advance a reconciliation process based on these principles. President Obama reaffirmed strong U.S. support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process and committed to make available additional financial support for the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) to facilitate the peaceful reintegration of former combatants into their local communities.

President Obama welcomed recent developments in Afghan-Pakistani relations. Both leaders emphasized the importance of continued efforts to advance Afghan-Pakistani dialogue aimed at building trust and producing tangible progress in the peace process, and improving the security situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region at large.

## **Reinforcing Regional Security and Cooperation**

The leaders called on all countries in the region to support Afghanistan's security, stability and prosperity. Both presidents endorsed efforts to deepen the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and expressed appreciation to China for hosting the October 2014 Heart of Asia summit and to Pakistan for hosting the next meeting later this year. President Obama welcomed steps by the National Unity Government to integrate Afghanistan more fully into the regional economy through various regional organizations, processes and programs and committed continued U.S. support for those efforts. President Ghani presented a development strategy built around regional connectivity, good governance, and investments for productivity. Central to this strategy is cooperation between Afghanistan and the region through trade, transit and investments. The two Presidents agreed to work to bring together like-minded countries to discuss Afghanistan and regional integration efforts at a high-level meeting on the margins of the 2015 United Nations General Assembly meeting.

**Fostering Social and Economic Development**

The leaders acknowledged the significant challenges Afghanistan is facing as it strives to overcome its current budgetary gap, and become increasingly economically and fiscally self-reliant. Emphasizing that economic reform is a central pillar of the National Unity Government's agenda, President Ghani briefed President Obama on specific steps the Afghan government is taking to combat corruption, increase transparency, reduce poverty and create jobs. President Ghani noted that in addition to many recent achievements, Afghanistan continues to face formidable challenges, including the need to root out corruption and strengthen good governance, build the foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, increase regional connectivity, and address illicit drug production in Afghanistan. In support of these efforts, President Obama and President Ghani announced a New Development Partnership that would focus up to \$800 million in U.S. economic assistance on urgent Afghan priorities tied to Afghan achievements of specific development results and implementation of key policy reforms. President Obama also welcomed the recent successful negotiation of an IMF Staff Monitored Program for Afghanistan. President Ghani committed to take action on all necessary steps needed to implement this program.

Both Presidents further welcomed the decision to resume regular meetings of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Council and the agreement to expand capacity-building cooperation between the U.S. Treasury Department and relevant Afghan government agencies as set forth in the agreement signed by Treasury Secretary Lew and Finance Minister Hakimi on March 23 at Camp David.

President Obama and President Ghani agreed that Afghan prosperity depended on the development of the country's human capital. To this end President Ghani reiterated the Afghan government's determination to educate all Afghan boys and girls. President Obama expressed U.S. intent to provide sustained support for education in Afghanistan. Noting the significant impact that educational and cultural exchanges have had on Afghan and American society, and the U.S. commitment in the SPA to promote such programs, President Obama announced the U.S. intention to increase the number of Fulbright fellowships available to qualified Afghan students by 50 percent for the next five years, making this one of the largest Fulbright programs in the world. In addition, President Obama announced the establishment of an \$18 million USAID scholarship program to support women attending universities throughout Afghanistan. The two presidents also welcomed the decision of the Smithsonian Institution to host a major exhibition of contemporary Afghan handicrafts in 2016.

### **Strengthening Afghan Institutions and Governance**

President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah outlined the National Unity Government's efforts to improve government performance, effectiveness, efficiency, and combat corruption. They also

underscored the National Unity Government's commitment to upholding the rule of law and reforming the judiciary. They stressed that restoring Afghan people's confidence in justice institutions is a top priority for the Afghan government. President Obama and President Ghani agreed on the importance of cooperating to provide justice sector personnel with the skills and qualifications needed to counter narcotics, ensure safe and humane corrections, expand legal education, protect the rights of women and girls, and provide other essential justice services.

Conclusion

This visit constituted the first meeting among President Obama, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah since the inauguration of the National Unity Government last September and marked a pivotal moment in the U.S.-Afghan partnership. Looking back, it was an opportunity to review the remarkable strategic, political and economic achievements of this partnership and the successful completion of the security transition in Afghanistan. Looking forward, both presidents endorsed a vision of a sustained relationship rooted in shared values, interests and sacrifices, bound by mutual commitments enshrined in the U.S.-Afghanistan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement.

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## **5. Dempsey: North Korea 'Somewhat Predictable' in Provocation (03-24-2015)**

*By Lisa Ferdinando*

North Korea is "somewhat predictable" in its provocation during the annual military exercises held between the United States and South Korea, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said today.

Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey said the exercises are very important to ensure there is a "credible deterrent against provocation" by North Korea.

"Besides the deterrent, [the exercises ensure] that we're also prepared with our military capabilities should [North Korea] do more than just provoke," Dempsey said.

Dempsey, who spoke in an interview aboard his aircraft as he traveled to Japan and South Korea, said the "exercises are a critical part of our relationship and we do them with a very steady drumbeat, the same time every year."

The joint operations are defensive in nature, and each year North Korea reacts, he said.

"They react in a provocative fashion, which of course has become somewhat predictable and reinforces the need for us to have these meetings and exercises with the frequency that we do," he said.

### **Exercises Highlight Allies' Collaboration**

The exercises are held to "rekindle" tactics, techniques and procedures, to ensure the United States can operate collaboratively with its own joint force and with its South Korean allies, the general noted.

The Key Resolve exercise took place the first two weeks of March. It involved computer simulations hosted at various sites across South Korea and the United States.

This year's Foal Eagle exercise, running March 2 to April 24, is a series of joint and combined field training exercises spanning ground, air, naval, and special operations.

## **Dempsey to Meet With Japanese, South Korean Leaders**

Japan and South Korea are key allies to the United States, the chairman said.

"I'll get a chance to visit with both military leaders and political leaders to reassure them of our commitments and to seek their insights into the region," he said.

Feedback from the allies, the chairman said, is "important for us to get their insights into the way they see the region evolving, so then we can collaboratively continue to adapt our relationship."

Dempsey travels first to Japan, where he said a topic in the meetings will be Japan's review of its defense guidelines that define the country's defense relationship with the United States.

Discussions in Seoul later this week, the chairman said, will build on previous conversations on transferring wartime control of allied forces, known as operational control, to South Korea, as well as previous talks on integrated air and missile defense, training exercises and response options to North Korean provocations.

"We try to meet with our Korean colleagues about every six months, and that's because there's enough to talk about every six months," Dempsey said. "We'll lay those out, review where we've been, and chart our way forward."

## **U.S. Military Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific Region**

The centerpiece of the visits is the U.S. military's rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, Dempsey said. "Militarily, I think we're actually about where I would expect we would be," he added.

The quality of the exercises and training has increased, and the United States has deployed its most technologically capable equipment in the Pacific area, Dempsey said.

"We've moved ahead with the rotational stationing of Marines and ships," he said. "We're making progress on building an integrated air and missile defense umbrella, [and] both the [South] Koreans and the Japanese have made some commitments in procurements on their side to make us more interoperable."

The chairman said he was generally pleased with the rebalance effort.

"I want to make sure that my actions keep up with my words," he said. "My words have been that the Asia-Pacific really matters ... so I am living up to that by making as many trips as possible."

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## **6. Security Adviser Rice's Meeting with Syrian Opposition Figure (03-24-2015)**

*THE WHITE HOUSE*

*Office of the Press Secretary*

Statement by NSC Spokesperson Bernadette Meehan on National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice's Meeting with Moaz al-Khatib

National Security Advisor Susan E. Rice met yesterday with Moaz al-Khatib, former President of the Syrian Opposition Coalition. Mr. Khatib offered his perspective on the path to a political

solution to resolve Syria's civil war. Ambassador Rice stressed that Bashar al-Asad has lost all legitimacy to govern and must go, expressed concern for the humanitarian situation in Syria, and reaffirmed the United States' commitment to a negotiated political transition that would preserve the institutions of the Syrian state, protect minorities, and lay the foundations for a more inclusive government.

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## **7. Joint Statement on Libyan Political Talks (03-21-2015)**

*Following is the text of a joint statement by the governments of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States on Libya.*

The Governments of France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States welcome the resumption of the Libyan political dialogue in Skhirat, Morocco. We strongly support the efforts of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Bernardino Leon, the UNSMIL team and the Libyan participants and congratulate them all on the progress made so far. We urge those taking part in the dialogue to enter into the discussions constructively and in good faith in order to reach agreement on a National Unity Government and arrangements for a ceasefire as quickly as possible.

We look forward to the meeting of Libyan municipalities to be hosted by the European Union in Brussels on 23/24 March, which will be an opportunity to discuss the implementation of the confidence building measures agreed upon at the last meeting in Geneva, the provision of urgently needed humanitarian aid and certain security arrangements on the ground.

We also welcome the meeting of political parties and political activists held in Algeria on 10/11 March and note the resolve of the participants to send a strong, clear and unified message on their full commitment to the dialogue as the only solution to the crisis in Libya, their refusal to resort to violence to settle political differences, their full rejection of all types of military escalation and their call for an immediate cessation of military operations to enable the dialogue to continue in a conducive environment.

In this context we strongly condemn the attack on Aziziyah on 19/20 March, ongoing air attacks on Zintan and Metiga Airports and Tripoli, and all other acts of violence. We deeply regret the fact that the warring parties refuse to stop the fighting, endangering civilian lives and leading to the destruction of Libya's national infrastructure. We call on the Libyan political leaderships to act responsibly and to make clear their support for the dialogue and call on them to exercise authority over military and militia leaders and ensure civilian oversight and control of their actions and disavow military actions not taken in that framework. Those who seek to impede the UN process and Libya's democratic transition, four years after the revolution, will not be allowed to condemn Libya to chaos and extremism. They will be held by accountable for their actions by the Libyan people and the international community, including through the sanctions provided for in Security Council Resolution 2174.

We are deeply concerned about the growing threat from terrorist groups in Libya, including Da'esh, who have expanded their presence in Libya as a result of the absence of a strong, united, central Government in the country. The United Nations-led process to establish a National Unity Government provides the best hope for Libyans to address this terrorist threat and to confront the violence and instability that impedes Libya's political transition and development. The international community is prepared to fully support a unity government in addressing Libya's challenges.

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## **8. Joint statement on progress of Iran nuclear talks (03-21-2015)**

We, the Foreign Ministers of France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States, together with the EU High Representative, met this afternoon to review progress in the nuclear negotiations with Iran.

We agreed that substantial progress had been made in key areas although there are still important issues on which no agreement has yet been possible. Now is the time for Iran, in particular, to take difficult decisions. Our negotiators, together with those from China and Russia, will resume meetings with Iran next week in Lausanne.

We reaffirmed that we are all equally committed to finding a solution that ensures that Iran's nuclear programme remains exclusively peaceful in line with its stated commitment. Any solution must be comprehensive, durable and verifiable. None of our countries can subscribe to a deal that does not meet these terms.

These negotiations are a shared effort among the E3+3 coordinated by the EU. Experts in different disciplines from every member of the group are contributing in depth to our coordinated negotiating positions and this coordination, as well as multiple bilateral talks with Iran, will continue to be a vital part of achieving success.

We are at an important moment in the negotiations. If we are able to resolve all the main issues, technical work will follow to convert a framework into a detailed text.

We will all continue to work together with unity of purpose to secure a successful outcome.

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## **9. Facts on Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (03-20-2015)**

### *Fact Sheet*

### **The International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification**

“The United States proposes to work with both nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapons states to better understand the technical problems of verifying nuclear disarmament, and to develop solutions. This new initiative will...create a non-traditional partnership that draws on the expertise of talented individuals around the world, in both the public and private sectors.”

- Under Secretary of State Rose Gottemoeller, Prague, Czech Republic, December 4, 2014

On December 4, 2014, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose Gottemoeller announced a new initiative to enhance security and stability in the effort to reduce and eliminate nuclear weapons – the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV).

The Partnership's first meeting was held March 19-20 in Washington, D.C., with a broadly representative group of states participating.

The IPNDV brings together both nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states under a cooperative framework to further understand and find solutions to the complex challenges involved in the verification of nuclear disarmament.

The United States believes such engagement will strengthen existing work towards the goals of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

### **Nuclear Disarmament Verification and Technical Obstacles**

Future steps in nuclear disarmament will pose significant verification challenges. Success in addressing these future challenges will require the development and application of new technologies or concepts. All countries have an interest in the success of these efforts. A larger, more diverse group of states with technical expertise in nuclear verification or the related sciences will contribute to the discussion and provide a broader intellectual basis for determining solutions.

### **The Partnership**

The IPNDV will consider verification challenges across the nuclear weapons lifecycle – including material production and control, warhead production, deployment, storage, dismantlement, and disposition. It will build on lessons learned from efforts such as the United States–United Kingdom Technical Cooperation Program and the United Kingdom–Norway Initiative.

To take this Partnership forward, the U.S. government will work with the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) through an official public-private partnership. Drawing from its recently concluded project, [Innovating Verification](#), NTI will bring its expertise and resources to bear to help guide the process of standing up the International Partnership and assist in the development and implementation of a program of work.

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## **10. Facts on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Disarmament Pillar (03-20-2015)**

“Peace with justice means pursuing the security of a world without nuclear weapons.” – President Barack Obama

### **Disarmament**

The 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) is the cornerstone of the nonproliferation regime and the basis for international cooperation to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

For nearly half a century, the three mutually reinforcing “pillars” of the treaty – nuclear nonproliferation, disarmament, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy – have provided a strong foundation for cooperation to reduce global nuclear dangers and contributed profoundly to international security.

The United States is committed to seeking the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. Since the NPT entered into force, the United States has made significant progress towards disarmament – actively reducing the total U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile and limiting the role of nuclear weapons.

### **Progress**

At the height of the Cold War, the United States possessed 31,255 nuclear warheads, as shown on graph to the right. Following years of committed, persistent progress, our stockpile as of 2013 stood at 4,804 – a reduction of 85 percent. Additionally, from October 1993 through September 2013, the United States dismantled 9,952 nuclear warheads. Several thousand additional nuclear weapons are currently retired and awaiting dismantlement.

We continue to reduce the numbers and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. We are successfully implementing the New START Treaty with Russia that will reduce strategic nuclear forces to their lowest levels in more than fifty years. As of September 1, 2014, the United States had 1,642 deployed strategic warheads under the New START Treaty.

Decades ago the United States ended nuclear explosive testing and the production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons, and has removed 374 metric tons of highly enriched uranium and 61.5 metric tons of plutonium from use in nuclear weapons.

Taken together, these removals account for enough nuclear material for more than 22,000 nuclear weapons. The United States has transformed its nuclear complex toward science-based stewardship of this shrinking stockpile and eliminated whole classes of nuclear weapons.

### **Future Reductions**

Against the backdrop of this historic progress, U.S. disarmament efforts continue. President Obama made clear in Berlin in 2013 that we can ensure the security of America and our allies while reducing our deployed strategic nuclear weapons by up to one-third below the level established in the New START Treaty. The United States stands ready to negotiate further cuts with Russia, and to work with our NATO allies to seek bold reductions in U.S. and Russian tactical weapons in Europe.

Decades of efforts have taught us that there is no viable alternative to practical, responsible and verifiable step-by-step disarmament. There are no short cuts to lasting progress. The United States remains steadfast in its commitment to the NPT's disarmament pillar.

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## **11. Allegations of Chemical Weapons Use in Sarmin, Syria (03-19-2015)**

*Press Statement*

*John Kerry*

The United States is deeply disturbed by reports that the Assad regime used chlorine as a weapon again, this time on March 16 in an attack on the town of Sarmin. We are looking very closely into this matter and considering next steps. While we cannot yet confirm details, if true, this would be only the latest tragic example of the Assad regime's atrocities against the Syrian people, which the entire international community must condemn.

What is clear is that the Assad regime continues to flout international standards and norms, including, if these latest allegations are verified, the Chemical Weapons Convention. The international community cannot turn a blind eye to such barbarism. As has been well documented, the Assad regime continues to terrorize the people of Syria through indiscriminate airstrikes, barrel bombings, arbitrary detention, torture, sexual violence, murder, and starvation. The Assad regime must be held accountable for such atrocious behavior.

A chemical weapons attack through the use of chlorine would not only be the latest example of the regime's brutality towards the Syrian people, but also a direct violation of UN Security Council Resolution 2209, which specifically condemned the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon in Syria and made clear such a violation would have consequences. Any and all credible allegations of chemical weapons use, including the use of toxic industrial chemicals, must be investigated, and we continue to support the OPCW Fact Finding Mission in its continuing critical mission.

*March 26, 2015*

The Assad regime's horrifying pattern of using chlorine as a chemical weapon against the Syrian people underscores the importance of investigating this allegation as quickly as possible, holding those who perpetrated such abhorrent acts in violation of international law accountable, and continuing to support the complete elimination of chemical weapons in this volatile region.